DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 130 752 PS 008 764

AUTHOR	Anderson, Zola
TITLE	Getting a Head Start on Social-Emotional Growth: A Guide for Preschool Teachers.
INSTITUTION	Nebraska Univ. Medical Center, Omaha. Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Inst.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Child Development (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	May 76
GRANT	OCD-85-208-543-02
NOTE	97p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Media Center, Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute, University of Nebraska Medical Center, 444 South 44th Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68131 ($2.00)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$4.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Activity Learning; Adjustment (to Environment); Aggression; Behavior Problems; Classroom Environment; Discovery Learning; *Emotional Development; Emotional Problems; *Guides; Play; *Preschool Children; *Preschool Education; *Preschool Teachers; Self Concept; Self Control; *Social Development; Socialization; Social Relations; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to help the preschool teacher understand the children in her classroom and assist them in social-emotional development. The booklet has four objectives: (1) to increase the teacher's understanding of the child's needs; (2) to discuss ways the teacher can provide a climate for healthy emotional growth; (3) to help the teacher observe and evaluate behavior; (4) to give recommendations for children with serious emotional difficulties. Chapters explore stages of social-emotional growth, feelings and emotions, social-emotional needs, classroom intervention, coping with frustration, play and its meaning, focusing on the environment, self-concept and social-emotional development, limits and self-control, educational approaches to social-emotional growth, recognizing potential emotional problems and helping the child with emotional difficulties. (MS)

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GETTING A HEADSTART ON SOCIAL EMOTIONAL GROWTH

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A Guide For Pre-school Teachers

ED130752

GETTING A HEAD START ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL GROWTH

A Guide for Preschool Teachers

by

Zola Anderson, M.A.
Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute
University of Nebraska Medical Center
Omaha, Nebraska

Artwork by Helen Gloeb

PS008764

The work herein was written expressly for the Head Start programs in Nebraska pursuant to Grant #85-208-543-02 from the Office of Child Development, Region VII, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. It does not necessarily reflect O.C.D. position or policy. Official O.C.D. endorsement should not be inferred.

Published by:

Resource Center for Handicapped Children
Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute
University of Nebraska Medical Center
444 South 44th Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68131

May, 1976

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PREFACE

This booklet is designed to help the preschool teacher understand the children in her classroom and assist them in social-emotional development. Social-emotional development refers to the child's interaction with others and feelings about himself. A preschool child may have experienced situations which caused delay in his emotional development and contributed to lowered self esteem. As a result, he may have feelings of failure, or might exhibit ways of maladaptive interacting. However, personality patterns are not usually wholly ingrained at this early age. The young child is surprisingly responsive to positive experiences. Therefore, the preschool teacher has an exciting opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the child's life. She can create a climate wherein the child can try out better ways of interacting with peers and adults. With the help of an understanding adult, the child can learn to understand his feelings and thereby resolve beginning conflicts before they become serious problems.

The young child's development has been compared to an elaborate piece of fabric, with all areas of development (physical, mental, motor, language, and social-emotional) interwoven in a complex and unique way. Problems in any one area will be reflected in all other areas. Although this booklet focuses specifically on social-emotional growth, the importance of all other areas of development is implicit. While social-emotional growth is a product of all interactions between the child and his environment, the child's individual characteristics will influence his pattern of reaction. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the child with physical or language handicaps is "at risk" for developing delays in social-emotional growth. He may be in need of specific help. The environmental conditions of poverty can also be very influential in setting a pattern for the development of a poor self concept and an expectation of failure. The focus in promoting social-emotional growth must be broad enough to include all aspects of the child's life, yet it must concentrate on everyday situations.

The objectives of this booklet are fourfold. First, it is hoped that the teachers will gain some understanding of normal preschool emotional growth so that increased understanding will enable them to "tune in" on the child's needs. Many variations in social-emotional growth fall within the

scope of normality, and great fluctuations normally occur in these formative years. Yet, the healthy child's progress is toward maturity. Second, some of the many ways in which the preschool teacher can provide a climate for healthy emotional growth will be discussed. Third, ways to observe behavior will be suggested so that the preschool teacher can distinguish between fluctuating normal and abnormal behavior, and will know when to seek the help of a mental health specialist. Finally, specific recommendations are given for children with serious emotional difficulties. The teacher's constructive manner in dealing with the social-emotional aspects of the child's life may serve as a model for the child's parents, extending the growth-promoting help to the home and further enhancing the child's future development.

I wish to express my gratitude and thanks to the people who assisted in the preparation of this manual. Dr. Paul H. Pearson, Dr. Frank Menolascino, Weslee D'Audney, Margie Armfield and Barbara Anderson reviewed the original manuscript critically and offered many valuable suggestions; Cheryl Hein typed the copy. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

Omaha, Nebraska
May, 1976

Zola Anderson, M.A.

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CHAPTER 1

STAGES OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL GROWTH

Just as there is a normal sequence for a child's mental and physical development, there is also a normal sequence for social-emotional growth. While each child is unique, and different families or cultures encourage different aspects of emotional growth; there is a similar sequential pattern of development in this area common to all children. The preschool teacher's understanding of this sequence of social-emotional growth will permit the teacher to set the stage for the child's next step in development. Just as it would be useless to expect the child to read before he could match shapes, so would it be useless to expect the child to play cooperatively in a group before he had learned to play away from his mother's side. It is frustrating to both adults and the child to expect behavior beyond a child's age and stage of development. Interaction skills and the ability to be a productive member of a group, develop in a step-by-step manner.

Stages of Play

The young baby's early play mainly involves pleasure to the senses such as tickling and touching, gives way to exploration of the environment through poking, pinching, stroking, and finally --playing with toys in a solitary manner.

At the age of 2 to 2½ years, the *solitary play* gives way to *parallel play*, where two or more children play side by side with similar toys. They enjoy each other's presence but there is no real exchange and sharing in the play.

The next stage of play development is called *associative play*, where young children begin to do things in groups. Activities such as block building or playing with toy telephones blossom, but there is no division of labor and no organization to the play.

"YOU BE THE FATHER
I'LL BE THE MOTHER
MARY, CAN BE OUR CHILD."

Still later, after the age of three, preschoolers move on to *cooperative play*, where the children themselves assign and discuss different roles in a big project. There is now a marked sense of belonging or not belonging to the group. Interactions increase with age. As socialization skills increase, quarrels decrease in number. The child who is delayed in socialization should be encouraged to play alone, or side-by-side near another child before he is forced into large group play. Group interaction skills are learned in a step-by-step manner through experience in associative and cooperative play. Just as summer follows spring, the young child needs a growing period before he can launch into complex group interactions.

Stages of Self-Control

There are stages of play, and there are developmental stages in the way preschoolers express displeasure. The young child's quarrel behavior progresses from a grim and wordless tug-of-war over a plaything, hitting, screaming and crying, to attacks on belongings of other children, to more civilized verbal quarrels as the child matures and language is used to solve conflicts. The four year old's increasing facility with

3

and love of language often results in aggressive talk rather than physical attack.

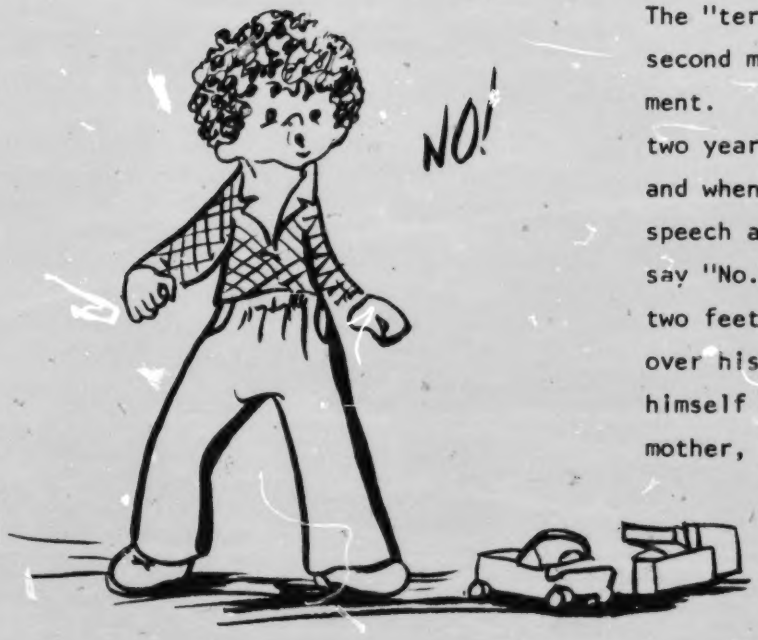
Cooperative play requires the child to wait for a turn and to take directions from others. The use of words instead of physical assault to settle quarrels requires increased self control and means that the child must be able to express his feelings in more mature and acceptable ways. Only with experience and age can this increased self control be expected of the child.

The classroom routines must be adjusted to the child's level of self-control, so he can function successfully and move on to the next level without becoming unduly frustrated and programmed for failure.

Stages of Emotional Development

As the young child grows in emotional development, he has many stages to conquer and conflicts to settle. Sometimes, in learning about himself and the world, his ways of trying out solutions may be very uncomfortable for the adults around him. As the child actively masters his environment, the stepping stones to a healthy personality will merge to provide a united path leading to healthy social emotional growth. The earliest stepping stone to adulthood is the development of a sense of trust and the secure feeling that one's basic needs will be met.

The infant is totally dependent on adult caretakers for survival. Affectionate ties between the infant and adults usually develop as the mother is feeding and attending to the physical comfort of the infant. The basis for trust in others begins to emerge as a result of good care in infancy, but confidence in the environment is not completely established in the preschooler. It must be continuously reinforced through all of childhood. In the preschool classroom the young child needs to be reassured that his physical needs will be met.



The "terrible two's" characterizes the second major stage of emotional development. With the ability to walk, the two year old can decide when to come and when to go. The development of speech also allows the young child to say "No." He can now stand on his own two feet and can exercise some control over his environment. His awareness of himself as a person, separate from his mother, has developed. He is aware of ability to make decisions, and when practicing this new skill may go to extremes by saying "no" to everything.

There are also increasing social demands on the child of this age. A balance must be found between independence and dependence. To encourage pride, the young child must be allowed to make decisions for himself within his capabilities, but he must be protected from challenges which are too difficult for him. Firmness coupled with tolerance will help the young child develop dignity and personal independence. Although the "negative" stage is generally over by three or four years, the precarious balance between cooperation and willfulness may be disturbed occasionally. The preschool teacher may see periods of over dependence when the child is experiencing periods of stress and insecurity. This may be caused by the arrival of a new baby in the family, illness in the home or anything that upsets his routine. The young child often needs special attention at these times.

When he is firmly convinced that he can find comfort when he needs it, and can make decisions for himself, the four year old is faced with the next step in social-emotional development, which involves finding out what kind of a person he will be. This is the stage of initiative and is often characterized by aggressive behavior that may be unintentional.

The four year old may irritate his playmates and parents with his forceful actions, startle them with his aggressive talk, and intrude into the unknown with a boundless curiosity. Because of the four year old's flowering imagination, he often cannot avoid frightening himself with his own thoughts. Through play and imitation, the four year old tries out various adult roles, and gets the feeling of being a boy or a girl. As he imitates the significant adults in his environment, he also takes over their standards of right and wrong and begins automatically to feel some guilt about some behaviors. His self-control is not yet well developed at this stage, so the tendency to blame a young child for things he does not fully understand must be guarded against. If he is made to feel too guilty, his initiative and confidence will be undermined.

By the time the preschooler is ready to enter kindergarten, he will have experienced many stages of social-emotional growth. The road may be winding and uneven, but he is on the course for healthy social-emotional growth, a course which will continue throughout his life.

CHAPTER 2

FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

Although feelings cannot be measured, they are real. Preschool children have very strong feelings--anger, fear, love, hate, jealousy, happiness. All of these feelings are normal. Emotions are tones of feelings related to the satisfaction or frustration of the child's needs. When the child's needs are satisfied, he feels positive emotions such as love, joy, liking, and happiness. Negative emotions such as fear, hate, anger and depression are feelings associated with the child's response to the loss of a person the child considers necessary to fulfilling his needs.

Although emotional responses are inherent, each child's idea about the situation he finds himself in is learned. Different children may find the same situation more or less threatening. For example, Robbie may be fearful during a trip to the zoo because his need for security is threatened by the possibility that he may become lost. On the other hand, Sue may know that the possibility of getting lost exists, but is aware that the zoo attendants could help her locate her teacher. Therefore, she does not share Robbie's fear.

The class may be prepared for field trips and other new experiences by dramatizing the situation and having the children act out various roles.

When emotions are not accepted or given adequate expression, an uncomfortable tension may develop. The feeling may reach a level of intensity which becomes overwhelming to the young child. If teachers can accept the feelings of a preschooler as normal and not blame him, it will be easier for the preschooler to deal with them successfully. For example, although the teacher may not like the fact that Johnny hates Bobby, the teacher's ability to accept it as a normal feeling, without judging it, will help Johnny handle this unpleasant feeling. The more intense the emotion, the

more difficult it will be for the child to control it and express it in acceptable ways. For this reason, social-emotional growth can be promoted by helping the child express his feelings.

The child will require many opportunities for trial and error practice in expressing emotions. It will be easier for him to learn to do this if he has good models to imitate. The child who sees physical aggression as an everyday way of expressing negative emotions will need a very kind, understanding teacher who can model acceptable ways of expressing feelings about the child's behavior.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL NEEDS

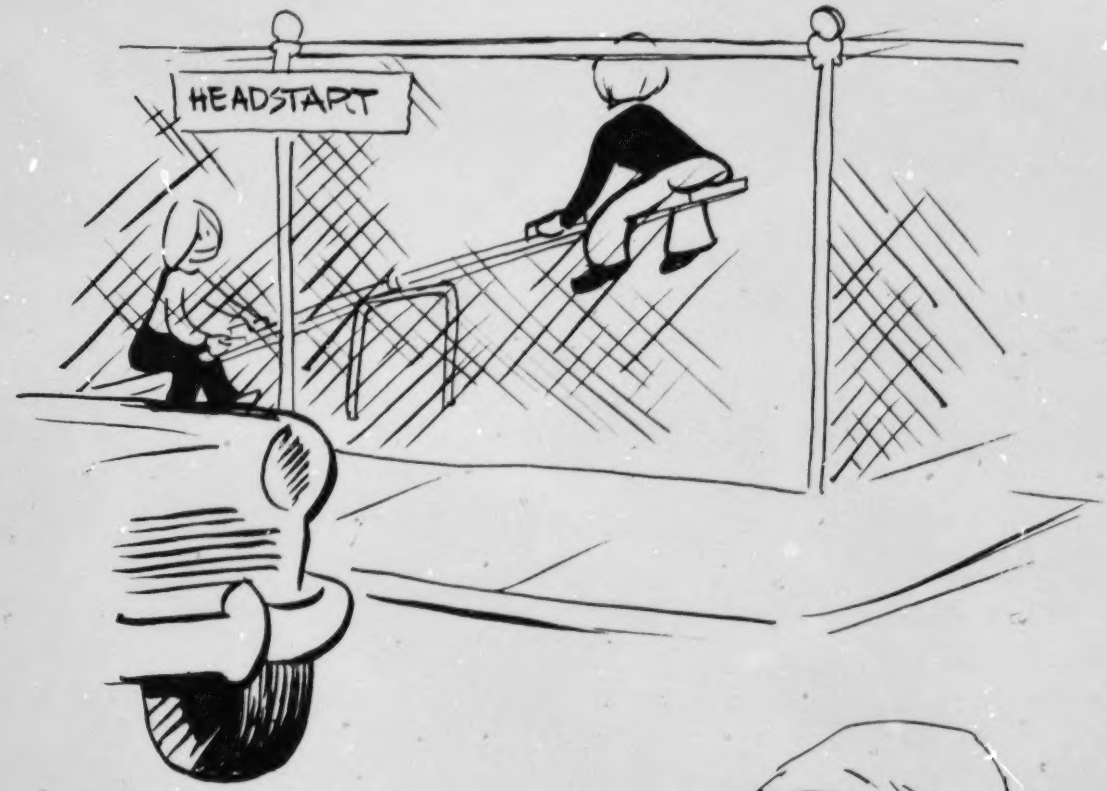
All children have certain basic needs which are important to their social-emotional development. One of the major tasks facing the preschool child is learning how to satisfy these needs without harming himself or infringing on the rights of others. Even the happiest childhood contains some frustration. In order to learn to live in the real world, the young child must experience both need satisfaction and a certain amount of need

deprivation. A child whose every need is satisfied immediately will not learn to wait. He may have temper tantrums when the gratification of his needs are delayed. Similarly, too much deprivation of need may result in strong negative emotions such as lack of trust and aggressive behavior.

The child's needs may be classified in many different ways:

-Physical Needs. Every child's physical needs must be satisfied to maintain life. They include food, oxygen, shelter, sensory stimulation, motor activity, and sleep. Deprivation of these needs often results in a child being overly preoccupied with their satisfaction. For example, the young child who has been deprived of adequate food may grow up to be a compulsive eater. Snack time at the preschool is more than just a time to eat. It is important that it be a pleasant experience. The child's basic need for physical activity and relaxation is also important to consider in planning the preschool schedule. The child who does not have ample opportunity to run and play, interspersed with quiet activities, may become irritable.

-Safety Needs. A child feels safe in an environment which protects him from harm. If the physical environment is unpredictable and does not have limits which make him feel protected, he may be afraid to act spontaneously. For this reason, a totally permissive environment may be very anxiety-producing for the preschool child.



-Love and Belonging Needs. The young child must be accepted and loved for himself, rather than for his specific behaviors. He must feel that he is a special person and a valuable member of the group.

-Mastery of the Environment Needs. Every child needs to achieve and master some aspects of his environment. This includes being able to make decisions within practical limits. It includes a desire to find out how things work and to test one's abilities with others. Children often engage in activity for the pleasure they derive from the activity and from accomplishing tasks. For this reason; new and interesting activities are essential to meeting the needs of the preschooler.

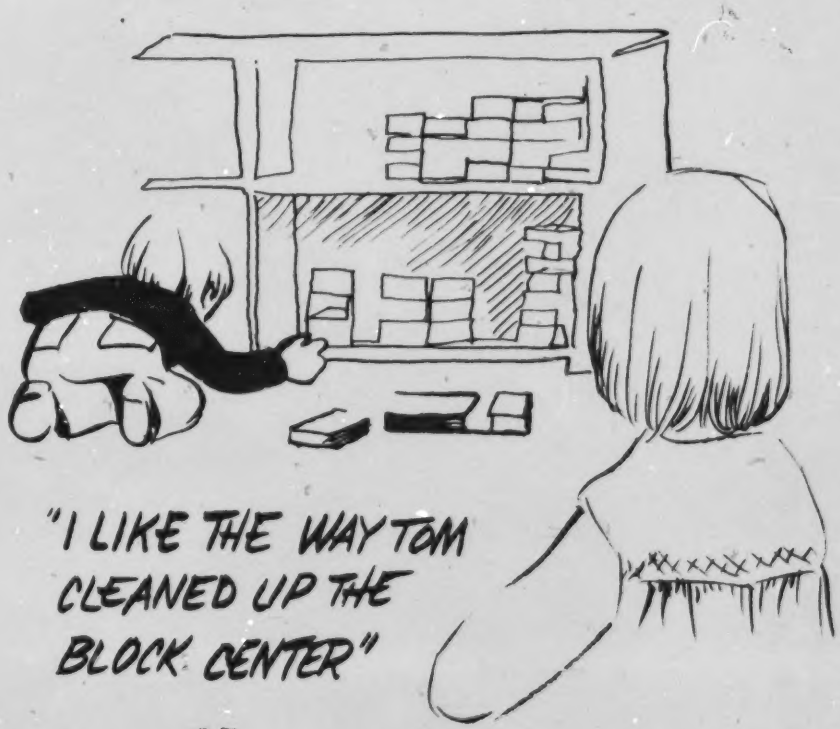
-Esteem Needs. Children as well as adults need to receive recognition from others. This need is met only if the child has an opportunity to do something which is seen by *others* as being worthwhile.

-Self-actualization Needs. This focuses on the need to be oneself and do things which are self-satisfying. Some free play and choice of activity in the preschool classroom provides an opportunity for the young child to meet this need.

Each child has a unique blend of needs and a unique way of satisfying them. For example, the preschooler may go to the housekeeping corner and pretend to cook a meal because he is preoccupied with being hungry (physical need), or because he likes the praise from the teacher who pretends to taste his make-believe dishes (esteem need), or because he likes to complete an activity on his own (self-actualization need).

Young children who have unmet needs for love and belonging often seek satisfaction of this need from the staff of the preschool. This would be the child who is always clinging and hugging. The staff can provide love and affection on a temporary basis, but unless the home is involved in better meeting this need, a long term adjustment may not be forthcoming.

When needs are frustrated, the young child feels tension and uneasiness. Some frustration is a part of daily living, but the frustration should be geared to the child's tolerance level. For example, the young child may be praised for doing almost anything in order to satisfy esteem needs, while the older child should be praised for more demanding task completion. Ideally, the teacher should ask the child to perform tasks which are within his realm of capability so he can honestly earn praise and esteem.



Every normal child is occasionally thrown off balance by some event in his daily living which threatens his basic needs. For example, it is not unusual for a child entering preschool for the first time to be threatened in terms of his need to feel that he is a valuable member of the group. Even when the preschooler is well prepared for a new baby, he may feel temporarily unloved because of all the attention given to the new sibling. Close communication with the child's family will enable the preschool staff to anticipate the child's need for extra attention when events occur which may be viewed by the child as a threat to his basic needs.

PART II

CHAPTER 4

COPING WITH FRUSTRATION

A child's behavior is the window to his inner feelings. In order to understand the child's frustrations, the preschool teacher must first recognize the feelings behind the behavior. Children may reveal their frustration directly by talking about their feelings, or by behavior such as kicking and screaming. The teacher should carefully observe the child's behavior and listen closely for the meaning of the child's verbal comments. However, the older preschool child may have learned to cope with frustration in more indirect, subtle ways which will tax the ingenuity of the teacher as she attempts to understand his feelings.

Coping Devices

The ways in which a child tries to gain satisfaction and come to terms with the frustration of his needs are sometimes called "coping devices." Coping devices are used by all children, and adults as well. The maneuvers which the child uses to avoid feeling tense and frustrated may take many forms. It is the effectiveness of their application and their consistency with normal personality growth which determines their long term value in social-emotional growth. Effective coping devices will reduce the child's

tension so that he will not need to use them on a continual basis. If the coping device does not operate successfully, or if the frustration is too great, the child may continue to employ the coping device, often to the detriment of his total social-emotional development.

Some of the ways children attempt to deal with uncomfortable feelings are listed here together with some positive suggestions for the teacher.

PROBLEM PRESENTING BEHAVIOR	
Simple Coping Device	What the Teacher Can Do
Touch, rhythm and physical closeness. Just as the younger child is comforted by being rocked, the unhappy preschooler may seek solace by continually rocking in the toy boat, twisting his head and rubbing his face, or seeking physical closeness with the teacher.	
	The alert teacher can provide a message of understanding by holding the preschooler and reassuring him with words, patting him on the back and providing acceptable physical closeness.

Simple Coping Device

Increased oral stimulation. The infant may resort to thumbsucking in times of stress, and the preschooler may revert to thumbsucking or chewing on toys when he is worried or tense.

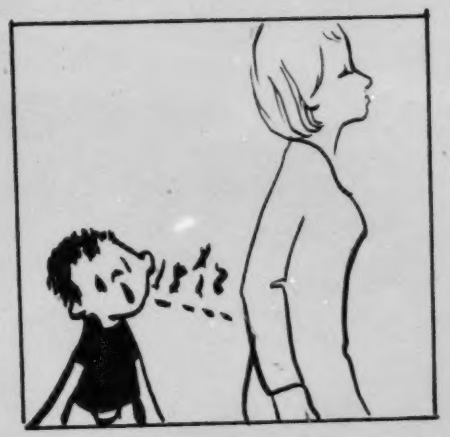
What the Teacher Can Do

Although thumbsucking cannot be encouraged because of the social stigma attached to it, tension releasing opportunities can be provided through acceptable oral activities such as blowing bubbles, biting on crisp vegetables or increased "talking" activities. Meanwhile, the underlying source of the frustration should be explored.

Simple Coping Device

Increased verbalization. While spontaneous singing, and laughing usually indicate feelings of confidence and security, crying, uncontrolled laughter, swearing and excessive talking may be signs of tension and insecurity. The insecure child may ask many questions, but will really be seeking reassurance from the teacher rather than specific information.

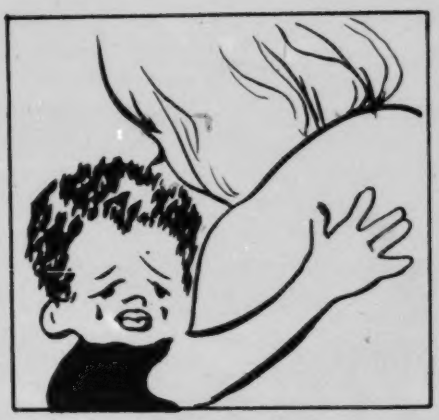
What the Teacher Can Do



The perceptive teacher will help the child understand his feelings and reassure him of her acceptance of them. Often an explanation geared to the emotional content of the question of the child will be more helpful than answering the specific question. Because of the shock value of profanity, swearing will often decrease when it is ignored.

Simple Coping Device

Whining and crying. Uncomfortable feelings may be released by whining and crying. Because of the discomfort it brings to adults, crying is often discouraged by comments such as "You're too big to cry."



What the Teacher Can Do

Recognize the child's feelings by telling him you are sorry he is sad. If the child is sad about a recent experience, the teacher may take him aside and talk with him about the incident. Often a hug will communicate the teacher's concern for the unhappy child. Whining should not be reinforced by undue attention; although the teacher may find it helpful to spend more time with the child at other times of the day. The staff should be alert for unusual physical or environmental problems if crying and whining suddenly increases.

Simple Coping Device

Increased physical movement. Activity level varies from child to child and from situation to situation. Movement often serves to release tension. The child who moves excessively may be seeking to drain off tension.

What the Teacher Can Do

The overly active child adjusts best to a simple structured environment. It is best to gear activities within his level of tolerance. He may adjust better to a small group where he does not have a long wait for turns. Rules should be very consistent and clear. Quiet activities should be interspersed with vigorous play. A fast walk around the playground, pounding at a workbench and hitting at a punching bag all help the tense child relax. The child's attention span may be increased by systematically rewarding him for increased attending behavior. The active child receives considerable negative feedback from those around him so it is especially important to help him gain feelings of self-esteem.

Simple Coping Device

Unwillingness to share. Most young children find it difficult to share. The meaning of time (now and later) and the meaning of possession (yours and mine) must be learned by the child before he can share. Older children who feel tense and unsure of themselves may also have times when sharing is difficult.

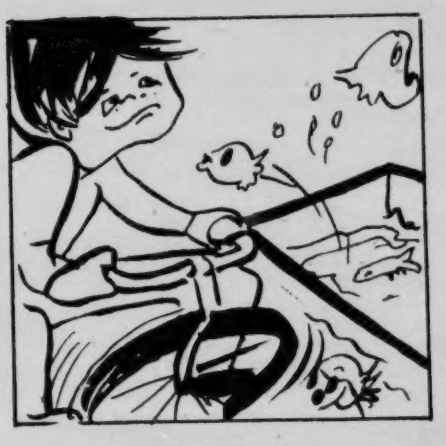
What the Teacher Can Do

By designating a place in the classroom for each child's belongings, the children will be provided with security regarding their possessions.

When the young child learns to enjoy his classmates, he will find it less threatening to share. Popular toys which require long waiting for turns should be duplicated. Toys that encourage cooperation on the playground such as wagons, balls, and the teeter totter are helpful in teaching children to share. The teacher may make positive suggestions to encourage the sharing of toys. Sharing is usually rewarded informally by group consequences; however, the teacher may further encourage sharing by systematically rewarding it with a smile or compliment.

Simple Coping Device

Destructiveness. Destructiveness may be accidental or intentional. Preschool children are naturally energetic and aggressive. Accidental destruction should be ignored.



What the Teacher Can Do

Accidental destruction often can be reduced by rearranging the classroom environment to provide designated areas for different types of play. Safe areas should be available for the constructive discharge of energy. Activities should be clearly within the capability level of the children so that equipment can be handled without accidents. Materials and equipment should be durable and child oriented. New activities should be supervised and demonstrated in a step-by-step manner so that the young child learns to use equipment appropriately. Many interesting preschool toys can be disassembled and reassembled without harm to the equipment, thereby providing an outlet for curiosity and aggressiveness.

Simple Coping Device

Fearfulness. Fear of realistically dangerous situations is reasonable and valuable in protecting the young child from danger. Sometimes children have unreasonable fears which are related to frightening experiences or unsettling factors in their life.

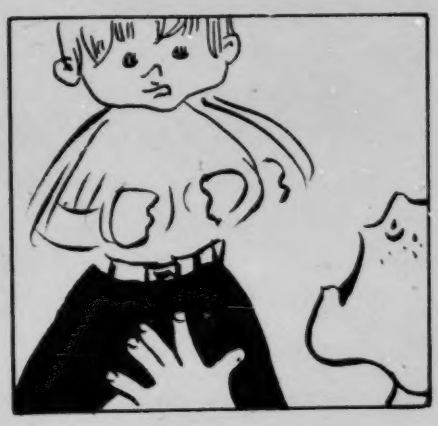
What the Teacher Can Do

When the young child becomes afraid, reassure him by holding him, talking quietly to him and distracting him. When he is calmer, he may be able to talk about his feelings and dispel tension. The teacher can gradually expose the child to the threatening situation in a supportive environment.

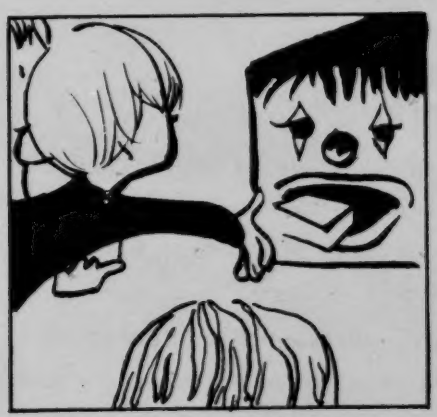
When introducing new experiences, the teacher should tell the class about the coming event and prepare the children through classroom activities such as role playing.

Simple Coping Device

Increased aggression to other children. Children who are engrossed in active play sometimes hurt others accidentally, especially if they have had few opportunities to play with children of their own age. Sometimes aggression is a way of releasing uncomfortable feelings.



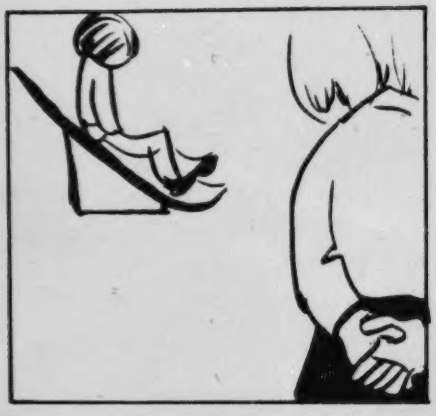
What the Teacher Can Do



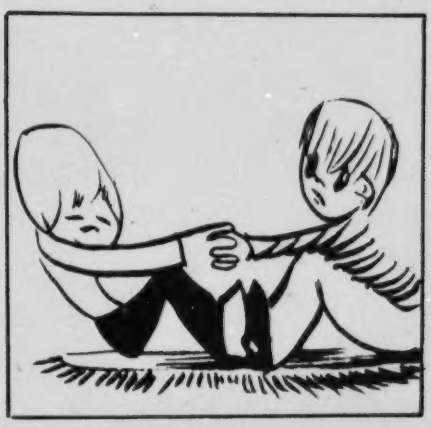
Occasional unintentional hurting may be ignored, with a quiet reminder of safety rules to the child. However, the teacher should intervene quickly to prevent injuries or aggressive attacks. Activity should be redirected into safe channels. Knives, guns and other toys which stimulate uncontrolled aggression should be discouraged. Active physical play should be provided as an outlet for aggression. Removing the aggressive child from the group for a brief period may help him pull himself together and realize the consequences of his behavior. The child who hurts other children should be guided into cooperative play and rewarded for these more appropriate interactions with other children.

Simple Coping Device

Isolation from group activities. While it is normal for very young children to play alone or side by side, by the time a child enters preschool he should be interacting with other children. If the child avoids group interactions consistently, he will be deprived of important socialization experiences. Often the child who isolates himself, lacks confidence and self esteem.



What the Teacher Can Do



To help the child feel more comfortable about joining a group, pair him first with one other child. When the "loner" feels comfortable with his partner, include them both in small group activities.

Frequent praise and positive attention will reinforce the child's interactive behavior.

Overdependence on Coping Devices

Children with many unmet needs tend to react in one of two ways: they either move away from the environment or strike out against it. Some coping devices that children over use in each of these situations can interfere with overall development and lead to serious emotional problems. For these reasons, the coping devices to which the teacher should be "on guard" in each situation are described here.

Moving away. The child may move away from environmental interaction by withdrawal, avoidance, escape, or immature behavior.

When frustrations are imposed on a child by his parents (on whom he is dependent for his basic physical needs) a conflict may arise. The child may *repress* his feelings of hostility toward all adults.

Although some *repression* is part of growing up, the child who cannot verbalize or release hostility in acceptable ways may use up the energy he needs for learning in trying to keep his true feelings hidden. Sometimes the hidden feelings become redirected against others in the environment. For example, a boy who was scolded unjustly for something his sister did at home may take out his resentment at the Head Start center by refusing to enter into a circle game or to do the table tasks planned for him.

Another form of escape can be found in *fantasy* and *daydreaming*. Make-believe satisfactions may be substituted for the real satisfactions that are lacking in his world. Some daydreaming is normal. The four year old normally engages in much magical thinking and uses make-believe to try out life roles. However, the child who prefers daydreaming to real life interactions may be overusing this coping device because his life is so unrewarding. A good example is the child who prefers to stare out the window when there are exciting activities going on in the classroom. Every child should be allowed some time each day for solitary activities, but the child who consistently withdraws from social interactions will probably be unfulfilled in terms of his need to belong.

The child who is experiencing tension often resorts to an earlier developmental level (*immaturity*) to find comfort and avoid frustration. For example, the child who is feeling unhappy about his lack of attention because of a new baby in the home may suddenly seek the help of the teacher in putting on his coat. This is normal behavior which becomes a problem only if it persists. Normally, when the child feels secure again he will function independently.

Moving against. The child moves against his environment by striking out, destroying property, by using abusive language or being negative. Another group of coping devices which serve to reduce tension can be classified under this heading. In these situations the teacher may not even recognize the child's angry feelings. His aggression may be diverted or directed toward someone or something else in the environment--quite unrelated to the basic problem.

Displaced aggression is very common in the preschool playroom and is often described as "taking it out" on another child. A child who has been severely reprimanded in the morning as he leaves for school may strike the first child he meets upon entering the playroom. Although this may relieve his tension, the uncontrolled aggression may alienate the child from his peers, increasing his feeling of rejection. It is important for the teacher to examine the incidents leading up to aggressive attacks in the classroom, so that the original problem causing the frustration can be identified. Letting the child know you understand his feelings and problems, even though you cannot allow him to be aggressive toward other children, can help him to cope with frustration a little better. Occasionally the child's angry

feelings may be turned against himself. He may become accident prone. For example, he may fall frequently, pinch his fingers, or bite himself, etc. When the child is helped to recognize his feelings honestly, he will be able to handle them more intelligently.

Negativism, uncooperativeness and *bossiness* may also be ways of acting against the environment in an attempt to cope with feelings of insecurity. The insecure child who cannot be the leader in a group may become uncooperative and sullen. Preschoolers often cover up their uncomfortable feelings

about themselves by becoming very critical of other children and their work. The bully in the play group may be masking a deep seated sense of insecurity by assuming an aggressive role.

In summary, the preschool child uses many different coping devices to deal with frustration and tension resulting from his unfulfilled needs. These behaviors serve a purpose in that they temporarily reduce uncomfortable feelings. These behaviors may be a part of normal living; in many cases,

they are of short duration. However, some of the child's ways of coping with tension may interfere with his emotional development, especially if the real problem is not resolved. By studying the needs and the behaviors of each individual child, the perceptive preschool teacher can help each child recognize and accept his feelings. A child can learn to handle his feelings if his teacher understands his emotions and helps him find acceptable ways to express them.

CHAPTER 5

PLAY AND ITS MEANING

A noted child specialist has said that play "is the way a child learns what no one can teach him."* Through play, the preschool teacher can help children with confused emotions to work through their problems. Play is the main activity of the preschooler and it can be used to foster emotional growth. The teacher's ability to understand the child's play and communicate that understanding to the child may result in a healing, growing dialogue between them. The troubled child may find the help he needs to explore his problems and express his feelings through his play activities.

The value of play can be considered on several levels and in terms of a variety of social-emotional needs:

- Physiologically, play gives the child an opportunity to discharge excess energy, practice motor skills, develop an appetite, and even relax physically.

*Frank, L. K. in the Introduction of Ruth E. Hartley and Robert M. Goldenson's *Children's Play*. New York: Thomas Y. Cowell, 1957.

- In terms of his need to belong, the young child can be part of a make-believe family in the housekeeping corner. He may even find an acceptable outlet for his immature feelings. For example, the young preschooler may climb into a doll buggy with the instructions to his playmate "You be my mother and I'll be the baby. You take care of me."

- Through play, the young child learns what he is capable of doing as well as how to cope with frustration and solve problems. He builds inner resources to be used in future real life situations. The child who is building an intricate block structure in the play area is not only learning to manipulate blocks and experiment with balance and size, but is also learning to tolerate the frustration of falling blocks, share space with another child, and experience feelings of mastery in terms of completing his block structure.

- Feelings of mastery and achievement may be realized by the child pretending to be an adult. The make-believe or "as if" nature of play allows the child to bring out and learn to control feelings which might in real situations cause him to feel guilty, to fear adult retaliation or personal injury. Only in play can the preschool child "drive a car," "fly an airplane," pretend to be his parent scolding his little brother, or the doctor giving a shot. Through play, aggression may be expressed in a controlled manner. Notice the preschooler saying to her rag doll, "There, eat your cereal. You naughty baby! I'm going to throw you out the window, even if you are a little baby!"

- The joys, disappointments, and frustrations of life are present in preschool play, and the young child learns the consequences of his behavior in a natural setting with other children. He learns to use better ways to cope with his feelings. The child who attacks or quarrels with his playmates may learn by the consequences of his behavior that aggressive behavior is unrewarding.

- In play, the disappointed, frustrated child may express his feelings and communicate unmet needs. The teacher who learns the language of play can understand and empathize with the child.

Ingredients for Social Growth

Even the "free play" time in the preschool is guided by certain ingredients which are implicit in the situation. Some of the resources which may be used to promote social-emotional growth consist of other persons (namely the teacher and other children), the play materials, and the space.

People

The teacher and other children in the preschool program are the most valuable resources for influencing the way an individual child deals with himself and others. The teacher holds the key to the constructive forces of spontaneous play. For example, it's through her sensitivity and understanding of the individual child that she finds out why he cannot function in the social group and helps him utilize his strengths. In order to do this, the teacher must let him know that she understands him and believes in him and his feeling. In play activities the teacher can convey feelings of acceptance, faith and respect. Although the teacher should not be an amateur psychiatrist, nor should she try to be a substitute parent, the child may sometimes need to shift his attachment to her before he is ready to proceed with the more mature stages in relating to his peers. The teacher must be willing to give affection freely without babying or forcing her affection on the child. At this age, even normal children do change quickly from an attitude of bravado to uncertainty. The teacher must be flexible in meeting temporary needs. It is the teacher's duty to protect the child from environmental dangers, from aggression expressed by other

children, and last but not least, from his own immaturely expressed impulses. If the child loses control of his feelings, the teacher should quickly intervene to distract, restrain and comfort him, and help him understand his feelings so that he can gain control. If the teacher is too rigid, the creativity of the preschool will be destroyed. If the teacher is too permissive, the young children will not learn to accept the demands of reality which lie before them. The effective teacher is firm but relaxed, strong but warm, encouraging while setting limits, gradually helping the child to gain the self control implicit in growing up.

An interested teacher may become an empathetic listener and a communicator of emotional understanding on a day-to-day basis. In assisting the child to grow emotionally, she must listen, empathize and convey understanding of feelings, even while she is placing realistic limits on behavior. Children become wonderfully alive when they are listened to, understood, and accepted as worthwhile individuals. The teacher may assist individual children by providing a special playtime when the child receives her undivided attention, respect and acceptance. This experience may allow the child to express his own wishes, needs and feeling. In this "special" time together, the teacher will meet the child on his own level of understanding, accept his feeling and always allow him to take the initiative in deciding how to play. For some children, the teacher's smile or hug will let him know that he is understood and accepted. Talking about feelings individually and in groups should be a natural part of everyday life in the preschool. Human feelings are just as important as "things" and "concepts." The teacher should feel free to comment on the child's feelings and help him understand his emotions. It should be natural for her to comment that Bobby made Johnny angry when he took Johnny's clay, or that Sue feels lonesome because her father is no longer at home.

Other children in the program give the preschooler an opportunity to try out his feelings and attitudes with his peers. With children of his own age, the child can safely work out minor battles and try out different solutions to his problems. With children of his own age, the teacher does not have to protect the younger child from being domineered by the older. However, the inclusion of children of various ages, diverse cultural backgrounds and various handicapping conditions can enhance the social relationships of each individual child. A heterogeneous classroom offers the normal child an opportunity to accept the handicapped as fellow human beings, and the handicapped the opportunity to be accepted. The culturally deprived will learn skills from the culturally advantaged. The young child can model after the older child and the older child can learn to help and protect the younger. The teacher is a model for positive interactions and feelings.

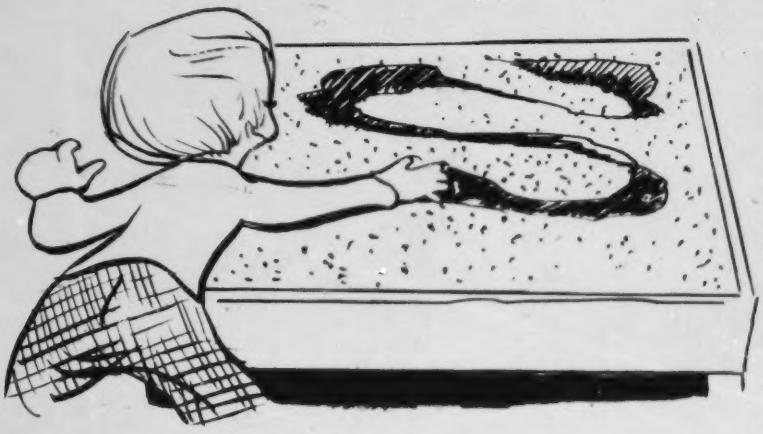
Play Materials

Another basic ingredient which contributes to social-emotional growth is the materials available for play. Valuable play materials are:

Blocks. Blocks are excellent media for making the new or timid child feel comfortable. He can play alone or join a group. Blocks are sturdy and the anxious child need not fear that they will break. They are clean and the perfectionistic child does not feel threatened. The timid child will feel powerful as he builds high towers. Through block building, the young child can participate in the powerful adult world. Blocks may be a safety valve for releasing pent up aggression. Blocks may even be used to build a structure to retreat from a threatening world. Because of their symbolic meaning, the blocks may become nursing bottles or guns. When the child projects his feelings and concerns to something as real and concrete as a block, his sense of personal threat is reduced. If possible, space should be provided so that some buildings cherished by a child can be left standing for continued play. The teacher may be the timid child's advocate by suggesting roles which involve joining the block play, but her suggestions should be geared to the child's readiness to participate. The expression of aggression with blocks should also be kept within the bounds of reality. Although blocks cannot be thrown about the room, the teacher may designate a box for block throwing with the rule, "Call me when you want to throw blocks, so that I can help you set up a target."

Water, clay and sand. Water play includes the use of water in conjunction with soap, bubble bath, pouring containers, rubber dolls, unbreakable dishes, etc. Preschool teachers may have built-up resistance to water play, despite its therapeutic value in the development of sensation and pleasure. Water may soothe the aggressive, stimulate the inhibited and hold the attention of the hyperactive child. Although a proper setting and some supervision is needed, water activities should not be unnecessarily interrupted by the teacher. Cleaning up activities are also valuable in allowing the child to try out adult roles.

Clay may be used at first for exploration and experimentation as the child pats, pounds and cuts. Later on the child will attain a sense of achievement in being able to manipulate the clay. The clay may be used to create a representation of another object. He may make a cookie which he uses realistically in the housekeeping corner. Clay provides an outlet for aggressive impulses and a medium whereby the child can experience feelings of mastery as he changes material. The value of working with clay as an experience is more important than the end product produced by the young child.

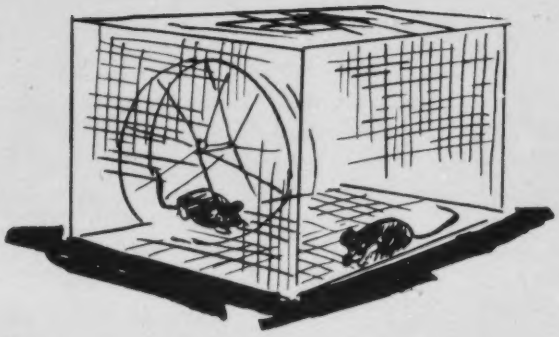


All children have a strong interest in sand play. The preschooler may enjoy feeling the texture of the sand as he pours it from container to container. Sand provides an opportunity for the child to become acquainted with the reality of cold, wet, hard, soft, etc. As control and imagination increase with age, sand play will become more creative with an interest in building roads, mountains, castles, etc. The child who is striving to deal with his aggressive feelings may build a castle housing the "wicked witch." The inhibited child may find an outlet for his feelings in the messy mixture of sand and water. Sand and water will allow the child to return to earlier developmental levels of play in a safe environment.

Paints and crayons. Children's drawings often reflect how they feel. Paintings express preoccupations which the child cannot yet comfortably put into words. Drawing permits a symbolic expression of feelings for the inhibited child. Painting also provides a controlled way for the child to be messy. Mixing the paints is therefore an important part of the play period. Often the young child is not attempting to paint a recognizable picture. The painting experience itself may be the most valuable aspect in terms of social-emotional growth. The inhibited child or the poorly controlled child may first need to enjoy the use of crayons. Later when the inhibited child feels more comfortable or the impulsive child has gained better self control, he may be ready for the joy of painting.

Dramatic play. The domestic corner with its dolls, toy furnishings, kitchen ware and dress-up clothes provides the setting for the ever recurring themes of dramatic play. Much of the dramatic play is modeled after the behavior of familiar adults. The child often works out his conflicts concerning familiar adults. Dramatic play also allows the child to rehearse future adult roles. The boy may practice masculine attributes, while the young girl may assume feminine roles, although there is much interchange of roles at this age. Dramatic play helps the child distinguish between reality and unreality.

Music. Listening to music, making music, moving to music and singing together all enhance social-emotional development. Well-guided musical experiences seem to calm the active child and allow him to channel explosive behavior into acceptable outlets. Music is also a good way to interest the withdrawn child in group interactions.



Animals and pets. Pets in the preschool become vehicles for teaching gentleness, compassion and responsibility. Animals provide natural lessons in procreation. Disadvantaged children, who may have had few pets of their own, often fear animals. These children need gradual exposure to a pet in the classroom so that positive attitudes will develop.

Space

Opportunities for exploration allow the child to move about spontaneously, while structured space provides a stable framework in which the young child will find a sense of order, organization and security. Freedom of space, therefore, should be freedom within limits so that the young child feels the security of being protected from physical danger.

In addition to space for activity and achievement, the preschool setting should have corners where the child can retire and be alone for temporary periods. By structuring time according to dependable schedules, the staff assures the child that there is predictability in his life. The program should be flexible enough to allow for individual differences and the capture of opportunities for spontaneous creative activities, such as an unscheduled walk in the first snowfall of the winter.

Summary

In summary, a number of principles for the value of play emerge.

- The preschool should provide many kinds of play material so that each child may find his own way to express his feelings.

- Verbal expression of feelings and attitudes should be encouraged during play.

- The teacher should attend carefully to the feelings expressed by the child and communicate her acceptance and understanding.

- The teacher should neither criticize nor approve the feelings of the child, but accept them as a normal part of him.

- Even though the child's behavior should be within limits, his dramatic play should not be curtailed by set social standards.

- Play becomes therapeutic when the teacher responds with sensitivity to the child's feelings, accepts his attitudes and lets him know that she has respect for him as an individual. When children and adults understand each other and learn to express feelings spontaneously with a degree of control, social-emotional growth will occur.

CHAPTER 6

FOCUSING ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Social-emotional development reflects the child's response to his environment, as well as his response to his inner feelings. Many social behaviors (such as playing, sharing and talking) are primarily learned from environmental interactions. For example, a young child learns to talk not only because he wants to communicate with his parents, but also because he is rewarded by his parents' response and approval as he begins to make sounds. Children learn many behaviors because their teachers smile and reward them positively or say "No. No!" People teach each other! The systematic use of learning principles to teach behavior is sometimes called using social learning principles or behavior modification. Since people in the child's environment are constantly reacting to his behavior, and to some extent modifying it, teachers should understand how the environment affects the child's behavior. Children learn appropriate social behavior more rapidly when they are systematically rewarded for their efforts and when the environment is designed to bring out the "best" in them. While designing the environment to provide consistent, selective responses to develop socially important behaviors, the teacher may continue to develop a warm relationship with the child and be sensitive to his feelings. Encouraging and teaching desirable social behavior will enhance the child's self image, as well as improve his interactions with those around him.

Criteria For Using Social Learning Principles

The application of social learning principles in a systematic way is a very powerful tool used to direct behavior. It should never be used indiscriminately to change behavior without a careful study to determine the conditions which brought about the behavior in the first place. It is easy to confuse the meaning of a child's behavior if it is viewed only in terms of what adults think is *right* and *wrong*. Direct use of the technique is most appropriate under the following circumstances:

- The change in behavior planned is desirable in terms of the individual child's needs, and overall social-emotional development.

- The behavior to be changed is the result of everyday punishments and rewards or inconsistencies in the environment.

- The behavior is a simple learned habit.

- The individual differences of children are considered in the selection of rewards.

If the behavior is complex and related to inner conflicts, a more appropriate approach should be determined by professional mental health specialists. For example, behavior resulting from complex memories, attitudes and feelings may require another approach. Although social learning principles may be used to some extent in all ways of encouraging social-emotional development, not all children learn best by environmental manipulation.

Principles of Social Learning

All human beings are affected by the positive and negative consequences which they receive from their environment as a result of their behavior. The principles of social learning are based on the belief that a child's behavior can be changed by providing rewarding or *reinforcing* consequences for desired behavior. When the desired behavior change becomes a habit, the child's attitude and self image will be altered and it will no longer be necessary to continue to reward the desired behavior everytime. For certain children, the systematic use of behavioral consequences will be effective in changing behavior. Most of the approaches to changing behavior are based on the following principles:

- A response which increases the likelihood that the child will repeat the behavior is called a *positive reinforcer.* A positive reinforcer (praise, attention, food, toys, points, privileges) immediately following a behavior will strengthen the behavior and make it more likely to happen again.

- A response which decreases the likelihood of the child repeating the behavior is called a *negative reinforcer* and will suppress the behavior it immediately follows. Negative reinforcement often has complicated results, such as teaching the child to dislike the teacher who administers the negative reinforcement; causing anxiety in the child; teaching the child to imitate undesirable behavior; and loss of long term effectiveness. Negative reinforcers will not teach the child what he should do in place of the undesirable behavior, and should be used only with great caution.

Undesirable behavior is best eliminated by ignoring it. Children do not keep on doing something which gets no reaction from those around them. Sometimes it may be necessary to remove a child from the play group for a short period. Placing the child in an area where he is isolated from all rewarding group experiences for a brief period is called "time out."

The schedule of the reinforcement is important in changing behavior. If the teacher wishes to increase a behavior just being learned, *the positive reinforcer should be consistently presented immediately following the desired behavior every time it occurs.* To maintain a behavior already learned, present the positive reinforcer occasionally immediately following the behavior.

The most powerful means of changing behavior is to remove all reinforcement for the undesirable behavior and at the same time reinforce the desirable behavior which is incompatible with it. For example, the teacher who wishes to eliminate an uncooperative behavior, must also teach and reinforce a cooperative behavior.

Shaping. If the child is not capable of performing the socially desired behavior because it is not in his repertoire, it will be necessary to teach the child the desired behavior in a step-by-step sequence. For example, the child who has never played with children before may first need to be taught to play quietly by himself, then play near another child and finally to play together with other children. Each step must be carefully planned and reinforced. Learning by dividing the behavior into small steps and consistently reinforcing each step is called *shaping*. To teach a new behavior by shaping, the following steps should be followed:

- Determine the level of the child's current behavior. (What can he do.)

- Decide what the target behavior will be. (What do you want him to do.)

- Break the target behavior down into small steps, starting at the child's current level.

- Positively reinforce each behavior which is a step closer to the final target. Reinforce only those behaviors which are closer and closer to the desired behavior.

- Raise the criterion for reinforcement until eventually the target behavior is reached.

Implementing the Principles. The success of the use of the principles of social learning will depend on careful planning. The program must be understood and followed by *all* of the staff working with the child. For this reason, the individual plan for each child must begin with a definition of the observable behavior which is to be reduced and a definition of the desirable behavior which is to be increased, so that reinforcement can be administered with consistency. Charting of the frequency of the desirable and undesirable behavior will provide the teaching staff with a baseline prior to beginning the reinforcement schedule. The selection of the reinforcer must also be carefully planned so that it is appropriate to the child's level. Praise and attention may be reinforcing to some children, while a less mature child will need a more primary reinforcer, such as food or a pat on the back. Constant evaluation will help the teacher appraise the success of her teaching and application of social learning principles. Evaluation will also provide the guidelines for program modification and changes in the teaching plan.

Imitation and Cues. Environmental happenings which precede a behavior are also important. Certain behaviors are more likely to occur during some activities and settings than in others. For example, a child who hits is often more likely to hit another child when all of the children are very close together, or when he is teased by a classmate. The event which happens immediately before a behavior is a *cue*. The teacher may use cues to provide the setting for desired behavior. If "sitting at the table" is the desired behavior to be reinforced, the teacher may cue the behavior by placing attractive toys on the table and immediately reinforcing the child's seating herself at the table to play with the toys.

Children also take cues from the behavior of those in their environment. Even without imitation of specific behaviors, children learn to be like those around them. Timid children may become more aggressive in a group of outgoing children. Aggressive children may become more timid in a quiet group. Every teacher has experienced the contagious learning which develops as the result of an incidental behavior which has occurred in the classroom quite by accident. One child may don a dress for role playing, and suddenly all the children are rushing to find long dresses. Imitation is a valuable tool to stimulate desirable social growth in the preschool, especially if the teacher systematically calls attention to the behavior she

hopes will be imitated. Interpersonal problem solving skills can be developed by training. Here are some examples of the use of imitation:

- Johnny, who always responds to teasing by crying and running away, may be told to watch Tommy, who ignores teasing by laughing and reciting "Sticks and stones..." After training and coaching, Johnny may try out Tommy's method of dealing with teasing, and for this he should be immediately reinforced with a nod, smile or compliment.

- Games in which the children must, singly or in unison, imitate the teacher may teach the children to imitate social roles. For example, the game "Who am I?" involves each child in imitating a social role as a father, mother, carpenter, doctor, etc. while the other children guess who the child is pretending to be.

- In another game, the teacher may tell a story whose words and actions the children are taught to repeat, thus encouraging imitation.

- Natural consequences may be used as rewards to encourage children to imitate desired social behaviors. For example, the two children who quietly leave the noisy group of running children to sit at the table may ostentatiously be given their snacks first. The children who independently dress for outdoors may be the first in the line to the playground.

- Social situations may be used in role playing. The teacher and another child can demonstrate appropriate behavior in certain situations. For example, children may be taught how to greet a guest or answer the telephone.

- Behavior rehearsal may include skits where problem behaviors are introduced and new solutions demonstrated through role playing. A feared activity may be the subject of a skit and the teacher can demonstrate how to deal with it. A demonstration of a doctor's examination in the classroom may prepare the children for a visit to his office.

- Gradual exposure to feared situations such as storms, snakes, etc., will desensitize the child to the fearful elements. Watching the clouds while discussing what is happening in nature before, during and after a storm may reassure the preschool child during the next storm. A fear of animals can be diminished through gradual exposure to animals and their habits.

Although behavior modification techniques initially focus on the structure, cues and reinforcement provided by the preschool staff, the child himself should be involved in eventually learning to adapt the principles to gain self control. Self management should be encouraged by teaching the child to give himself cues as antecedents to desired behavior. For example,

the impulsive preschooler should learn to move spontaneously to another play area when he is being distracted from task completion by noise and confusion. The child may also become very skillful in self-rewarding desired behavior. A preschool child is not too young to assume the responsibility for rewarding his own progress by taking a star for each segment of a completed task. By emphasizing the development of problem solving skills, the child's self control will be enhanced and his social-emotional growth promoted.

CHAPTER 7

SELF CONCEPT AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A child's attitude toward himself is the hub of his personality; it's his point of departure for everything he does and for the type of person he will become. The child who copes well with environmental stress and gets along well with others is operating on the basic assumption, "I am a valuable and worthwhile person, and so are you." Fostering this positive, healthy self-concept is one of the most important tasks of parents, teachers, and all those who work with young children.

How is self concept formed, and what can we do to help the unhappy child who has a negative attitude about himself?

The child's self concept develops from two sources. First, there is the "looking glass self," or the "me," which is the reflection of how others see him. Secondly, there is the "I," or the child's attitude toward his own body, sometimes referred to as "body image." Experiences in early childhood hold the key to what kind of a self concept the child will develop. The child who feels secure in his family and receives approval for his achievements will feel self confident. By the time the child enters preschool, he will have discovered that he is a separate person, has a name, belongs to a family. As he profits from preschool, he will learn that he is a competent person, that he has a certain sex, and that his ideas and feelings are valued.

Discovery of the physical self or "I" occurs gradually, beginning early in infancy when the young child moves his body and finds that he is a separate individual. He soon discovers parts of his body and finds that he can move them and use them to move objects in his environment. Later on he learns that he can control body functions. Since the child's feelings about his physical self play such an important part in self perception, they should be the focus of attention in the preschool for both the normal child and the handicapped child who may have physical problems. There are many ways in which the preschool setting can help the child develop a better body image and see himself as a unique, important person. A few of the many experiences which might contribute to a good self concept are:

- Frequent use of the child's name, when he is addressed in the classroom.

- Use of mirrors for games so the child can see that he is different from others and a unique person.

- Games stressing the identity of each child such as "Who is it?" or "Who is hiding?"

- Action songs involving body parts.

- Photographs or slides of the children in an interesting activity.

- Birthday parties stressing the importance of each child.

- Assembling a scrapbook about each child, emphasizing his favorite activities, foods, etc.

- Life-size drawings of a child made by tracing around him on a large piece of paper.

- Games, such as Hokey-Pokey, which help develop body image.

- Use of photographs of faces with expressions displaying happiness, sadness or surprise. Discussion of how the person in the picture feels.

- Preschools should be decorated with samples of every child's work to emphasize the value of individual achievement.

- Jobs in the classroom which are clearly within the child's capability will help him feel confident.

- In addition to belonging to the preschool group, the child's ethnic traditions should be a source of pride within the preschool.

- Gross motor activities, such as balance beam walking, animal walks, box games, ladder walks, crawling through an obstacle course, jumping, hopping, skipping and creative dancing are all pertinent to development of body awareness and body image. The young child compares his skill on the playground to that of his peers. If he fails to measure up to their standards his self concept may be lowered.

Because of the presence of the "me" in the self concept, the child's self image is highly influenced by how others see him, or how he thinks others see him. When he has formed a certain opinion of himself, he tends to seek out experiences which substantiate this self perception. For example, the child who feels he is unloved pays undue attention to the behavior of others which substantiates his feelings of being unloved. Sometimes he may tend to place himself in situations where he will live up to this image. It is important that parents and teachers *not* predict that a child will be unmanageable or naughty, or by words or behavior he will tend to fulfill the prophecy. Peer expectations, for either good or bad behavior, are highly influential, too. For this reason, the teacher often must assume the role of the advocate of the rejected child, hoping to change his peer group's perception of him. The preschooler's "me" and its relation to his adjustment should be the focus of parent education, so that a positive approach is carried into the child's everyday life.

Self Concept and the Handicapped Child

The handicapped child may have a difficult time developing a positive self concept and may be more susceptible to emotional disturbance. From infancy this child's parents may have had less than the normal amount of pride in his accomplishments. The guilt parents often feel because of the handicapping condition is also a factor in the child's self concept. In subtle ways the handicapped child becomes aware that he is not meeting expectations.

Furthermore, motor and sensory limitations may have restricted his ability to explore and develop independence as a person in his own right. He may not have felt the pride accompanying the mastery of body functions such as toilet training. The visibility of certain handicaps, such as cerebral palsy and seizure activity, are a special threat to the preschooler's self regard. Children with central nervous system impairment tend to have poor self control, with difficulty attending and sitting still. Often handicapped children are too protected from frustration and have had insufficient experience in coping with the frustrations occurring in daily life.

The need for medical and surgical procedures associated with many handicapping conditions may have resulted in separations from parents and painful procedures which the child may interpret as an insult on his body image.

The handicapped child should receive all the considerations essential for the normal child and special emphasis as well on the following areas:

- Additional individual stimulation may be necessary to prevent the development of stereotyped behaviors.

- Independent and active involvement in classroom activities should be encouraged by the preschool teacher to prevent the development of a passive dependent attitude toward learning.

- Practices which encourage regressive behavior (such as pushing the child's wheelchair, carrying a cerebral palsied child, leading a blind child, etc.) should be avoided unless they are absolutely necessary for the child's physical safety.

- Handicapped children need more than the usual preparation for surgery and medical procedures. They deserve a full explanation of what to expect prior to their visit to the hospital or clinic.

- Free play activities give a severely handicapped child an opportunity to work out his feelings of dependency and imperfect body image in a meaningful way.

- The preschool teacher can play a special role in demonstrating acceptance and normalizing attitudes toward the handicapped child in her program.

- Parent education, as it is incorporated into the preschool program, is a crucial factor in helping the handicapped child's parents to see the child as a person first and a child with a disability second.

CHAPTER 8

LIMITS AND SELF CONTROL

Limits are related to the child's needs for safety and *self-actualization.* Self actualization refers to the child's need to be a person in his own right. A balance must be found between restrictions which give the preschooler a sense of security and safety, and the freedom he needs for self actualization. Adulthood implies self-control, but the preschooler is not an adult, and until he has the judgment and self control to provide for his own safety and the rights of others, adults will have to provide limits.

Too much freedom leaves the child disoriented and anxious.

Too little freedom stifles his spontaneity.

Freedom within limits gives a child the confidence he must have as protection against his mistakes.

The Rationale for Limits

- Limits encourage the child to express himself in more mature symbolic channels. The destructive child will learn to release his hostility in a harmless fashion rather than venting his aggression in harmful ways.

- Limits enable the teacher to maintain her attitude of acceptance, empathy and regard for the child. They will prevent the child from getting too out of line.

- Limits strenghten the child by providing him with external control which hopefully he will adopt in the future. By preventing complete loss of the child's self control, the teacher avoids loss of self esteem in the child.

- Limits prepare the child for the reality of the world and teach him socially acceptable behavior which will be expected of him in other situations.

If the limits are carefully set, the teacher will feel confident about her rules and be able to act decisively with feelings of security. Children should have a great deal of choice as long as they stay within the limits which are clear, consistent and fair. The goal should be the development of self control.

Guidelines on Which to Base Limits

- Limits should be geared to the child's stage of development. Expecting behavior which is not within the developmental level of the child is frustrating to both the child and the teacher. For example, a two year old could not be expected to refrain from touching another child's possessions. (This may be within the realm of expectation for a five year old.) The teacher should watch the children for feedback regarding limits and be aware of the physical state of the children. A child will have more difficulty with self control when he is tired.

- Limits should be based on the rights of others and the safety of the children. Most preschools forbid the children to hurt others, throw hard objects, destroy toys, destroy furniture, or interfere with another child's play.

- Limits should be clearly defined with positive, friendly but firm explanations that the child can understand. Vague statements cause trouble, especially for the child who has difficulty in self control.

- The preschool teacher should avoid moralistic statements involving fear, shame, labeling as bad, etc., so that the child's self concept will not be endangered. The preschool child has not yet developed a sense of right and wrong and should not be expected to make moral judgments or be made to feel guilty.

- Resistances should be accepted and recognized comfortably by the teacher. The child should be allowed to express his negative feelings even though the teacher enforces the limitation.

- Gradualism is a good principle in enforcing limits. The child should be given warning and time to follow the rule. Disruptive behavior can often be avoided if the teacher prepares the child for changes.

In summary, an understanding of the value of reasonable limits will provide the teacher with the confidence to help young children control their behavior. There are four steps in the sequence of using limits effectively. First, the teacher should recognize the child's feelings about the limits and help him verbalize his frustrations. Second, the teacher should state limits clearly without making moral judgments about the child's behavior. Third, she should help the child find other channels of expression or substitute behaviors which are acceptable. Fourth, if the child refuses to comply after a reasonable length of time, the teacher should take his hand and lead him into doing what is requested, always with a kind, thoughtful manner which lets the child know the teacher is his friend. The teacher should be the kind of person she wants the child to be as she enforces necessary limits.

CHAPTER 9

EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES TO SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL GROWTH

The educational needs of a child cannot be separated from his social-emotional needs because self-confidence and social-emotional growth are enhanced by successful educational experiences. Successful learning will increase his faith in his ability to cope with life.

Educational objectives should provide an opportunity for creative thinking, problem solving, cooperative ventures between children, and interaction with all aspects of the environment. The young child's need for mastery will only be satisfied through active involvement which leads to the assimilation of new ideas and the acquisition of new skills.

Learning By Doing

First hand experiences with concrete objects encourage active thinking and provide the basis for understanding new concepts through self-discovery of the principles involved. The child who is learning number concepts must sort, stack, and compare objects before the rote counting of numbers can take on meaning. Manipulating objects provides the foundation upon which understanding is based. The child must be an active learner, rather than the passive recipient of the teacher's words that something is so. Verbalization should *follow* the understanding of a new idea. Being shown by someone else has little learning value, but first hand experience will motivate the child and then his

own discovery of the concept will become his reward. For example, when you allow the child to pour water from a tall glass into a shallow bowl, he will begin to learn that the amount of water remains the same even though the physical shape of the water takes on different dimensions.

Activity oriented experiences result in a child who is an active participant in the learning process. The intrinsic interest of the experience itself may cause the most resistive child to be cooperative, attentive and self-motivated. This interest will help the child focus on learning as a natural source of reinforcement. He will become an independent learner. Cognitive learning can be just as intrinsically exciting as playing, singing and running.

Individualized Learning

The most important factor in helping children function satisfactorily is the child himself. Activities in the preschool classroom, therefore, must be developmentally appropriate to the needs of each child; challenging in an interesting way but not above the child's frustration level. The same learning experience may be geared to the various developmental levels of individual children within the group. A task which is beyond the level of a child will leave him unrewarded and with a lowered self-esteem.

A group activity can provide learning activities at many different levels. Each child should be asked to respond within his own capability level. For example, if the class is making Christmas cookies, several children may be expected to mix ingredients. All children could be experiencing

the tactile input of working with cookie dough. One child may cut out simple circles for wreaths, while other children might be expected to cut out more complex cookie shapes. Decorating the cookies will also allow many different levels of response. The more capable children might frost cookies with a knife, while the children who are less adept in fine motor control might shake colored sugar on the cookies. Often a handicapped child must be lead through an activity, while the others can work independently. Different responses will be prompted and praised according to each child's ability level.

Each child should be encouraged to perform at his best without emphasis on competition or comparison with his peers. Each child should be praised for his effort rather than the results of that effort. To be emotionally healthy, each child must be allowed to learn at his own level, at his own rate and in his own style.

Remediating Deficits

Sometimes a child's educational deficits can hinder his interactions with his peers. Remediation for these problems can help children both educationally and socially.

The withdrawn child may be this way because of a communication disorder. The aggressive child may have difficulty controlling his fine or large muscles.

He gets into trouble for knocking over toys and pushing other children.

Working with the clumsy child on a walking beam can improve his body control. This allows him to exert more control as he works and plays in the group, as well as improving his ability to manipulate materials. Teaching the young child to ride a tricycle may boost his self confidence and encourage his participation in playground activities.

The hyperactive child may have difficulty screening out some of the sights or sounds in his environment. This would decrease his ability to attend and tend to make him disruptive when he is required to pay attention. Careful study of the child may permit remediation of these learning deficits thereby helping the child cope more effectively in the classroom.

Achievement and self-confidence go hand in hand. When the child can succeed in the interesting tasks required of him, he will be much less likely to withdraw, act out or become frustrated. Just as unsuccessful learning experiences and disinterest encourage alienation and emotional disturbance so learning achievement contributes to improved social-emotional growth.

In summary, the following principles should be considered in relating learning experiences to social-emotional growth.

- Each child has different skills and different needs and the program must be individualized to meet individual differences.

- Begin at the child's level and move at a rate that is comfortable for him.

- Find another activity that teaches the same skill if he is not interested in an activity that has been planned.

- Introduce new activities in combination with activities that call for skills he has already mastered.

- Provide opportunities for trial and error and imitation.

- Give the child an opportunity to be an active participant in the learning process.

- The joy of the learning process is more important than the finished product.

PART III

CHAPTER 10

RECOGNIZING POTENTIAL EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

All children need a loving, success-oriented learning environment. A very fine line exists between the normal preschool child and the one who has emotional disabilities. The behavior of the preschool child changes rapidly from day to day and from situation to situation. Emotional problems result not only from the characteristics of the child, but also from the characteristics of the environment and the complex interactions of the child's interaction with his environment. Fortunately, a young child's behavior can be improved. Positive intervention in the classroom and home environment can result in a positive change in the child's feelings and behavior. When emotional disabilities interfere with the preschooler's ability to learn and enjoy social interaction, the teacher should consider ways to individualize the school program to meet the child's special emotional needs.

In assessing the child's emotional needs, both the child's strengths and weakness, and his environment should be carefully studied. Physical problems such as decreased sensory acuity, neurological immaturities, and inadequate health are closely related to emotional development. Keeping in mind the child's psychosocial needs for love, esteem, and mastery, his home environment must be carefully explored. Has he had any traumatic experiences such as a recent divorce in the family, the birth of a new baby, the death of a significant member of his family? Has he been abused? Subtle family interactions such as the parents' encouragement of independence or dependence, rewarding of inappropriate behavior, or inconsistent management of the child by estranged parents may provide clues to the cause of the child's emotional problems. Because the young child is so dependent on his environment, and reactive to it, there are no short cuts in studying background factors.

The child's observable behavior provides additional clues for the teacher. Observation of the child's behavior is a valuable tool not only in determining the frequency of the problem behavior, but also in studying the conditions which set the stage for the behavior. Does the aggressive

behavior occur more or less frequently in certain play areas, with certain children, in large or small groups, during certain activities, at certain times of the day or with certain staff members? What incidents precede his outbursts, and what are the consequences of his outbursts? Does his aggressive behavior gain him the use of a toy another child has? Does he receive the teacher's attention only after an aggressive explosion? Situational analysis of the child's behavior will help the teacher and mental health consultant (whose classroom observation time may be limited) plan an effective intervention program.

Many behavior disorders of the preschooler are transitory, but like the common cold, they should not be ignored, if they interfere with the child's development.

A list of danger signs in social-emotional development might include the following behaviors:

Interactions with Adults. Does the child *usually*, over a *long period of time:*

- Find it difficult to separate from his parents.

- cling to certain adults.
- shy away from new adults.
- show excessive numbers of attention getting behaviors.
- manipulate adults by dawdling, excessive affection or tantrums.
- resist routines by becoming tearful, whiny or non-compliant.
- refuse adult help although he needs it.
- never voice his own desires.
- pull away from adults when physical contacts are initiated.

Interactions with Other Children. Does the child *usually*, over a *long period of time*:

- prefer solitary or parallel play.
- avoid certain children (such as those of the opposite sex).
- seek only one particular child to play with.
- constantly move from one play group to another.
- lack the facility with play materials to participate with peers.
- find it difficult to participate in social role playing skills.
- hoard materials or refuse to take turns.
- try to gain favor by bribing others and making promises.
- resolve conflicts by hitting, grabbing, tantrum or retreat.
- pick on small or shy children.
- tattle or complain to put himself in a good light.
- engage in thumb sucking, body rocking, head banging, etc.

- become absorbed in ritualistic activities as twirling objects, etc.

Self Help Skills. Does the child *usually*, over a *long period of tim*

- refuse to assume responsibility for dressing, eating and toileting
- refuse to enter new situations or use new materials.
- become overly frightened by unexpected noises.
- find it difficult to engage in purposeful activities on his own.
- have difficulty in coping with new situations.

- cling to comfort objects (blanket) or engage in baby talk, soiling and smearing.

- walk on tiptoe much of the time, talk in high voice, or drool.
- show signs of strain and anxiety (facial tics, hand wringing).
- have episodes of incontinence although toilet trained.

Play Activities. Does the child *usually*, over a *long period of time*:

- find it difficult to express feelings in play.
- seem to feel dissatisfied with himself.
- only enter the play group if invited to do so.

- dislike certain materials such as messy substances, finger paints, or clay.

- find it difficult to express aggression in a controlled fashion.
- become very upset when a toy breaks.
- use toys inappropriately.
- resist limits.
- display extreme behavior (timid or violent).

Because free play is the most natural expression of the young child, it is of special interest when evaluating the child's degree of emotional and behavioral disability. The play of the young child often focuses on his need for love and safety, or his need for mastery and power. These are normal preschool drives, but a preoccupation with play roles which express extreme degrees of these needs should serve as a clue to the preschool staff. Although the normal preschooler has a need for mastery and power, the maladjusted preschooler's destructive play is more intense and persistent without a gradual transition to constructive, creative play. The maladjusted child may show a preoccupation with being babied or a preoccupation with fear. The play of the hyperactive child is poorly controlled. His painting may go from a pleasant picture with bright colors, to randomly mixed paints piled on top of each other and finally splashed all over himself and the play area. His play may be accompanied by laughter, squeals and excited noise. He may be easily distracted from completion of tasks.

On the other hand, the play of the normal preschooler may show some of the above characteristics some of the time, but it is in general flexible, imitative, and constructive. The normal preschooler forms personal relations easily, enjoys using different play materials, easily substitutes acceptable play for primitive drives, and avoids extremes of emotions. He enjoys other children, shares toys and ideas, initiates play, and defends himself when attacked. He chooses toys without undue hesitation and expresses aggression through toys designed for that type of play (punching clown, pounding toys). The normal preschooler does not become too upset if he breaks a toy, but he does not derive pleasure from breaking the toy. Even the normal child tests limits occasionally, but with firm guidance he learns to accept reasonable rules without resentment. Although he may have an occasional accident, he generally pours water in the sand and not on the floor; he shoots at a target and not at his teacher.

The hallmark of normal social-emotional adjustment is a balance between extremes of behaviors and feelings. Regardless of how angry or hilarious a child may become in certain situations, the normal child can be reached and restored to an equilibrium. In appraising the presence of a serious emotional or behavioral disability, the teacher should:

- Attempt to sense the flavor of the child's world by looking for preoccupations, repetitions of themes and extremes in feelings.

- Attend to the child's unmet needs and assess his play to determine if it is the imitation of what actually occurs in his environment or an expression of his wishes and fears.

- Study his play to discover what the child thinks of himself.

- Study the environment to determine what events preceding and following the behavior may contribute to his problems.

CHAPTER 11

HELPING THE CHILD WITH EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES

The treatment of serious emotional difficulties must be based on a thorough study of the individual child's unique characteristics and interactions with his environment. After the teacher has studied the child and his environment, plans for intervention may be made. In almost all cases consultation with a mental health professional or other specialist will be required, although the teacher may wish to try out some techniques while awaiting such consultation. Intervention must be planned for each child in view of his own unique feelings and needs. The following suggestions are examples of plans for intervention.

The Fearful Child

Fear is natural and serves as a normal protection against danger. However, the child who is excessively fearful may miss out on learning experiences and feel very uncomfortable. He may be a perpetual worrier who often cries and withdraws from activity. While most children can handle their fears themselves through play, others need help in expressing their feelings and becoming more secure. The preschool teacher can only rarely reason the child out of his fears because these fears are unreasonable.

What the Teacher Can Do

- Routines should be made more predictable for the child. Discuss events in advance and prepare him for new adventures. Help him face new situations gradually.

- Encouraging the child to talk about what frightens him can go a long way toward putting him in control of his fears. Scoffing at his fears will only increase them; empathetic understanding will help to dispel the feelings behind the fear.

- The fearful child may need to have the teacher stay physically close to him in new situations. When he is frightened, the fearful child should be given immediate comfort by verbal reassurance and physical contact, such as allowing him to sit on his teacher's lap.

- Help him play out his fears if he is unable to talk about them.

- Build up his self confidence by praising him for his accomplishments and providing him with many happy experiences.

- If the child's fears appear to be due to learned behavior, he might be trained not to be afraid, by being taught to relax in fearful situations. The fearful child may be systematically reinforced by a treat or praise each time he participates in a situation which is frightening to him. Eventually the pleasure of the activity will be the reinforcing agent.

- Arrange for him to be the special friend of a child who is more confident and will introduce him to the fearful situation by modeling appropriate behavior for the fearful child.

- Consult a mental health specialist.

The Aggressive Child

Aggressive behavior may be unintentional, and occasional aggression can be considered normal. But the child who persistently hurts other children and destroys property is expressing troubled feelings. The aggressive child is often difficult to accept because he hurts other children and may even strike out at the teacher who is trying to help him become a happier child.

Until further study reveals the cause of his troubled feelings, the teacher may handle the situation by the following methods.

What the Teacher Can Do

- The child should be prevented from hurting others by diverting his actions or removing him from the group temporarily and letting him know that the teacher cannot let him hurt other children nor others hurt him. Removing him from the group for a short time will give him a chance to pull himself together.

- Avoid punishment since it may increase the child's anxiety, may increase aggression by causing him to imitate the punishment, and may cause him to dislike the teacher.

- Search for ways to make him feel accepted, important and capable. Watch for opportunities to praise him and give him more time.

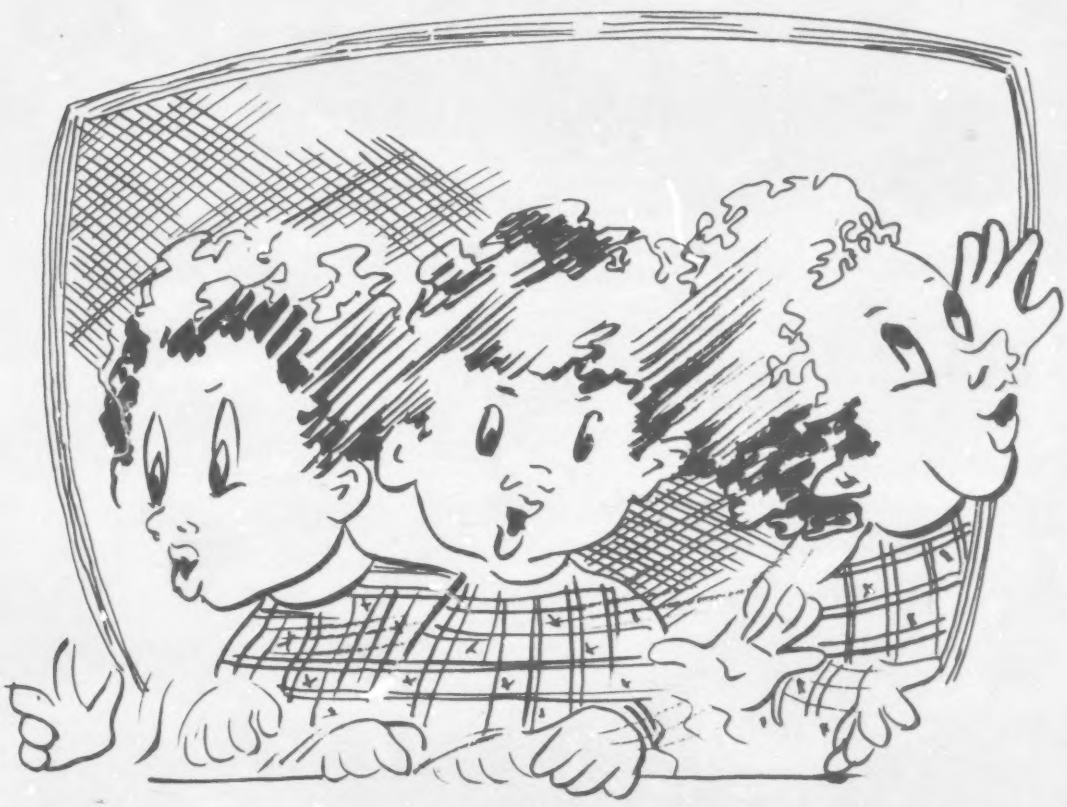
- Careful analysis of the situation which precedes the aggressive behavior may make it possible to arrange the classroom environment so that two children who are often in conflict will be separated. Toys which elicit aggressive behavior from certain children should be put away until self-control has increased.

- A "time out" procedure is often effective in reducing aggressive behavior. Using this social learning approach, for example, the child who hits is isolated from the group for 5 minutes every time he hits. This procedure should be supplemented by rewarding cooperative play.

- Consult a mental health specialist.

The Hyperactive Child

The overly active child is in constant motion, distractible, excitable and impulsive. He often becomes disruptive and aggressive in unstructured group situations. These children need more guidance and direction, especially in stimulating situations. The following suggestions may help him control his behavior.



What the Teacher Can Do

- Provide a quiet corner with a minimum of distractions for sit-down activities.

- In moving from one activity to another, the overly active child needs direction. His teacher may take him by the hand and say, "Bobbie, come and paint a picture." He may need to be guided from an over stimulating activity to a quiet activity.

- Because of the hyperactive child's inability to wait, frustration should be avoided by placing him in smaller groups where he has a turn without lengthy waiting.

- Quiet activities should be interspersed with active play so that the demands for sitting still do not become intolerable. Activities should be changed before the learning episode becomes a failure experience for the child with a short attention span.

- In retaining the overly active child, the teacher should systematically reward him for quiet on-task behavior, gradually lengthening the period for which he earns the reward.

- Consult a mental health specialist.

The Withdrawn Child

The withdrawn child is distant in his relationship with people. He may avoid eye contact and seldom smile at others. Withdrawn children communicate very little and seem to be most interested in solitary activities. It is most difficult to plan an intervention program for the distant child. The teacher will need specific advice from a mental health professional who has frequent contact with the child. Following are some suggestions for helping the distant child.

What the Teacher Can Do

- A program which is highly structured often provides the withdrawn child with security and optimal development. The use of routines and familiar activities will be important.

- If verbal communication is limited and the child seems to enjoy physical contact, the withdrawn child should be provided with physical closeness such as hugging, holding hands, etc.

- If the withdrawn child enjoys non-social rewards such as food, candy or toys, try to get him to associate these pleasurable experiences with social experiences so that he will learn to consider contacts with people to be pleasurable also.

- Consult a mental health specialist.

In discussing the above examples of plans for intervention, it must be stressed that each child is different from every other child. Teachers, too, are individuals, and each teacher has his or her own best way of reacting to behavioral problems in the classroom. While gaining an understanding of the child's behavior through consulting with mental health specialists, the teacher may also gain an increased self-awareness which generates more effective control of problem behaviors.

Conclusion

Social-emotional growth covers a wide range of subtle attitudes. The teacher who can tune in on the needs of the vulnerable child and give him a "head start" in social-emotional development may assist the child in attaining a more satisfying, useful life. The objectives of this booklet have been aimed at helping the young child:

- Find an adult whom he can trust regardless of previous experiences.
- Understand that he is trusted by an adult and loved in an unconditional way.
- Express himself and his feelings in an accepting environment.
- Know that his needs will be met most of the time, even though he cannot always have everything he wants.
- Accept necessary limits for safe living as an individual and member of society.
- Enjoy learning experiences and using materials.
- Feel good about himself and the things he can do as he looks to the future.

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